

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

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January 24, 2006

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

In a recent article by the Associated Press I was erroneously quoted as saying there is a role for so-called “peacekeeper” inmates in our state prisons.

“Peacekeeper” is not a term that I use. In fact, the word used to describe inmates who are enlisted by staff to mediate disputes among inmates, is not a term used by the Department, nor is the practice supposed to be used in the institutions. The use of inmates in this context can be very dangerous and it violates state regulations and department policies.

The only people entrusted to keep the peace in the state’s 33 adult prisons and eight juvenile facilities are sworn correctional peace officers who wear a badge.

That being said, how we work with inmates and the ways we communicate with them can define our success in the daily operations of the institutions. Communication is one of the most important tools a correctional officer has on the line.

Inmates are used to communicate with other inmates through departmentally approved Inmate Advisory Councils made up of representatives of that facility’s inmate population.

Consistent with California law, council members serve to communicate with the warden those matters of common interest and concern to the inmate population. Inmates who serve on these councils are supposed to be closely monitored to ensure they don’t abuse their positions to gain favors or status among the inmate population.

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Staff should not be dependent upon the inmates to communicate with other inmates or mediate differences between gangs. Staff should and do use their training in correctional awareness and communication skills to maintain institutional security and manage the inmate population. Like a police officer on the street, good communication skills inside a prison helps to gather intelligence and prevents violence in our facilities.

Any allegation of inappropriate use of inmates to mediate disputes should and will be thoroughly investigated by the department's Office of Internal Affairs and monitored by the Office of the Inspector General's Bureau of Independent Review.

The safety and security of the staff in our prisons and juvenile facilities is the most important concern to this administration and use of inmates to unofficially mediate differences is an unsafe and completely unacceptable practice that is not condoned by this department.

Sincerely,

Roderick Q. Hickman

Secretary

California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation

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